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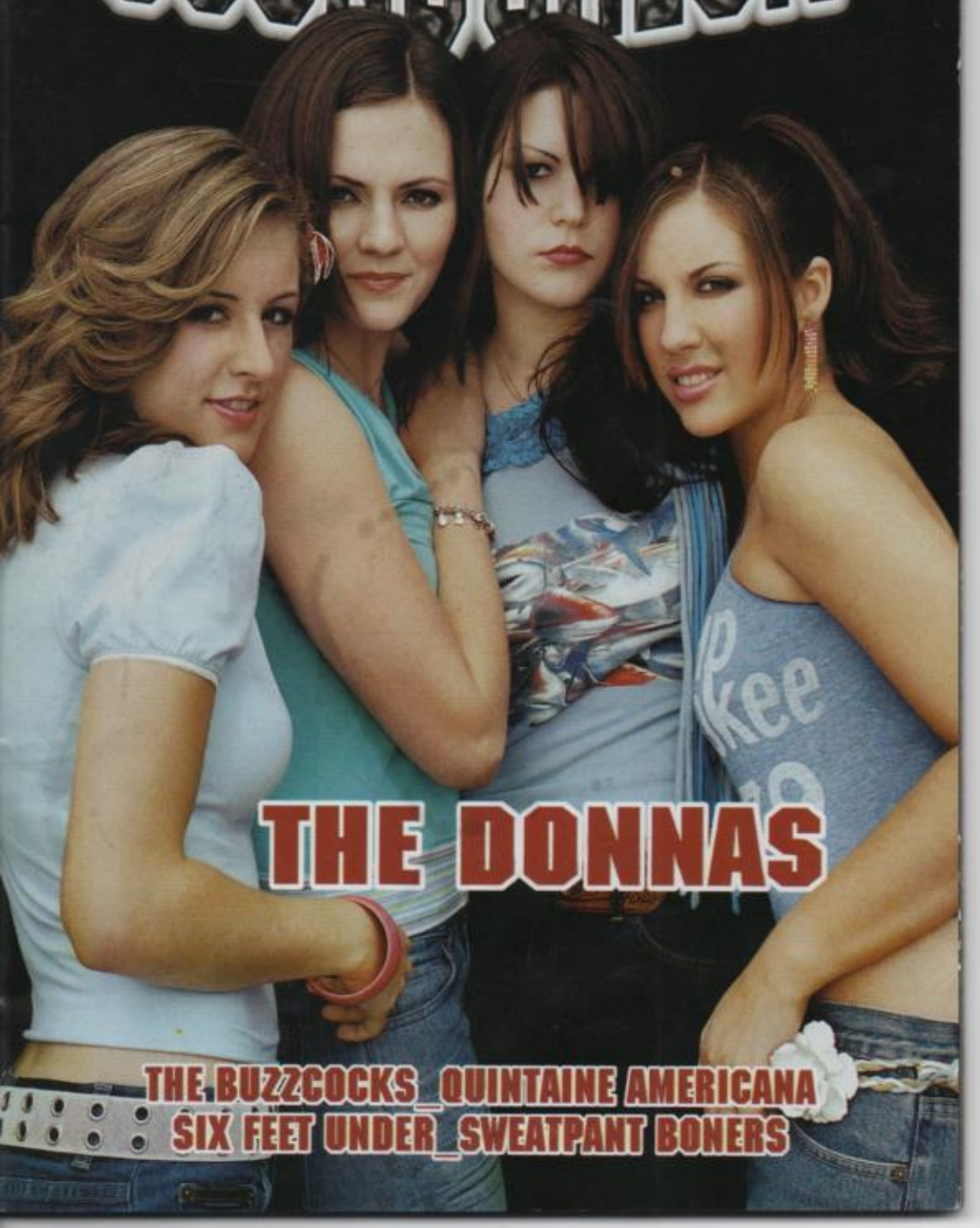

THE DONNAS

THE BUZZCOCKS_QUINTAINE AMERICANA
SIX FEET UNDER_SWEATPANT BONERS

SOUNDCHECK

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DOES YOUR MOTHER KNOW YOU DO THIS?

By Joel Simches

Special Episode: "The Station"

I didn't know I had even heard of The Station in West Warwick, Rhode Island until I saw the horrific video footage and realized that I had mixed a band there several months before. I was shocked and saddened by what I saw, because it should have never happened. I was even more appalled by what happened in the hours following this tragedy. The media is almost always naively clueless about what actually happens within our culture, specifically, in this case, in our music scene, but they were asking all the right questions about why and how this could happen. The answers they got, however, is an entirely different story. The first interview I "saw" on CNN was a phone interview with the club's "Stage Technician" (read - house sound guy) who told the reporters that he had no idea that Great White were using pyrotechnics and that if they had permission to do so, that he'd be the first to know. In my opinion, this is a load of crap, intentionally uttered to exclude himself and the club from any notion of liability. First of all, The Station predominantly hosts loads of '80s hair metal bands and metal tribute bands. Pyrotechnics is as common with this genre as is tight leather pants. Even if he didn't know the band were using this, he would have seen it being loaded in and plugged in, either during soundcheck or before the show. The type of soundmen that work these clubs are very territorial about their stage, their sound system and, in fact, their club. You couldn't plug in a fan onstage without the soundman knowing about it. This is the same soundman that stood behind me with a decibel meter while I was mixing to make sure that the music wasn't too loud!! The layer of soundproofing that covers the back of the stage is covered from floor to ceiling with egg crates. While professional soundproofing is flame retardant, egg crate packing is little more than pressed cardboard and would go up in flames from the heat of a strong stagelight. Egg crates are extremely cheap and easy to come by and are really good at absorbing soundwaves, whereas the more heavy duty sound insulation is very expensive. While not completely inflammable, this stuff burns and the fumes are extremely toxic, hence the thick black smoke. The lead singer of Great White claims that the band had permission to use spark shooters in the club. I find this statement to be highly questionable. Touring bands at this level rarely deal directly

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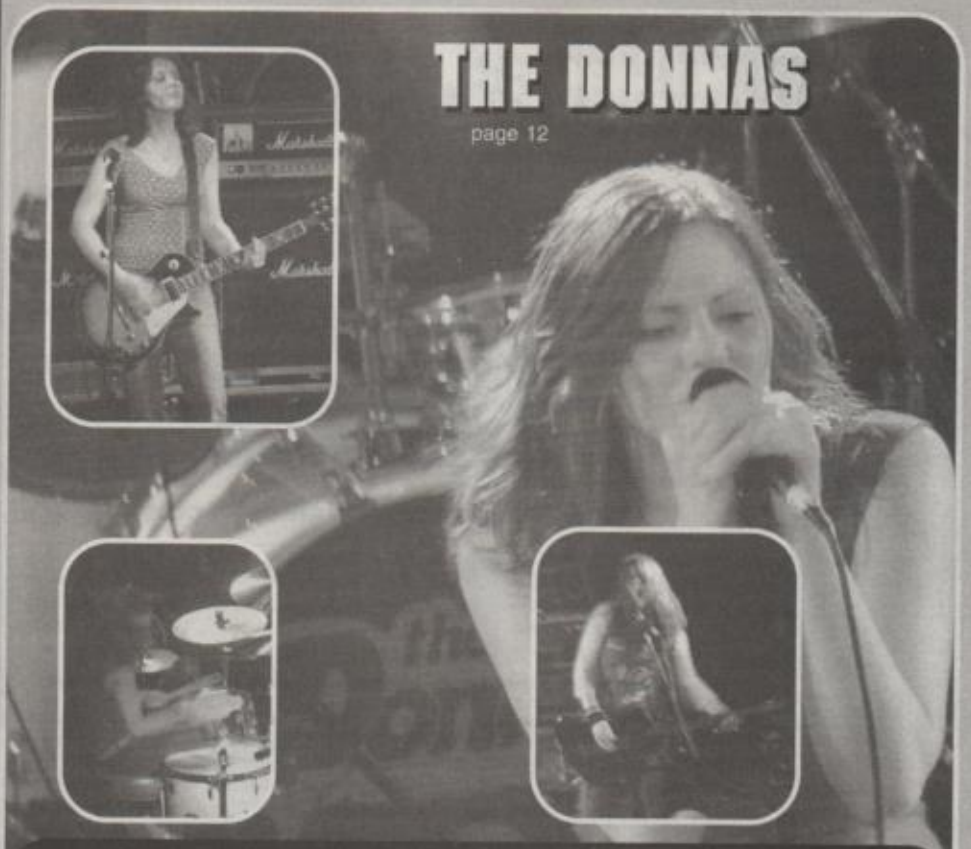

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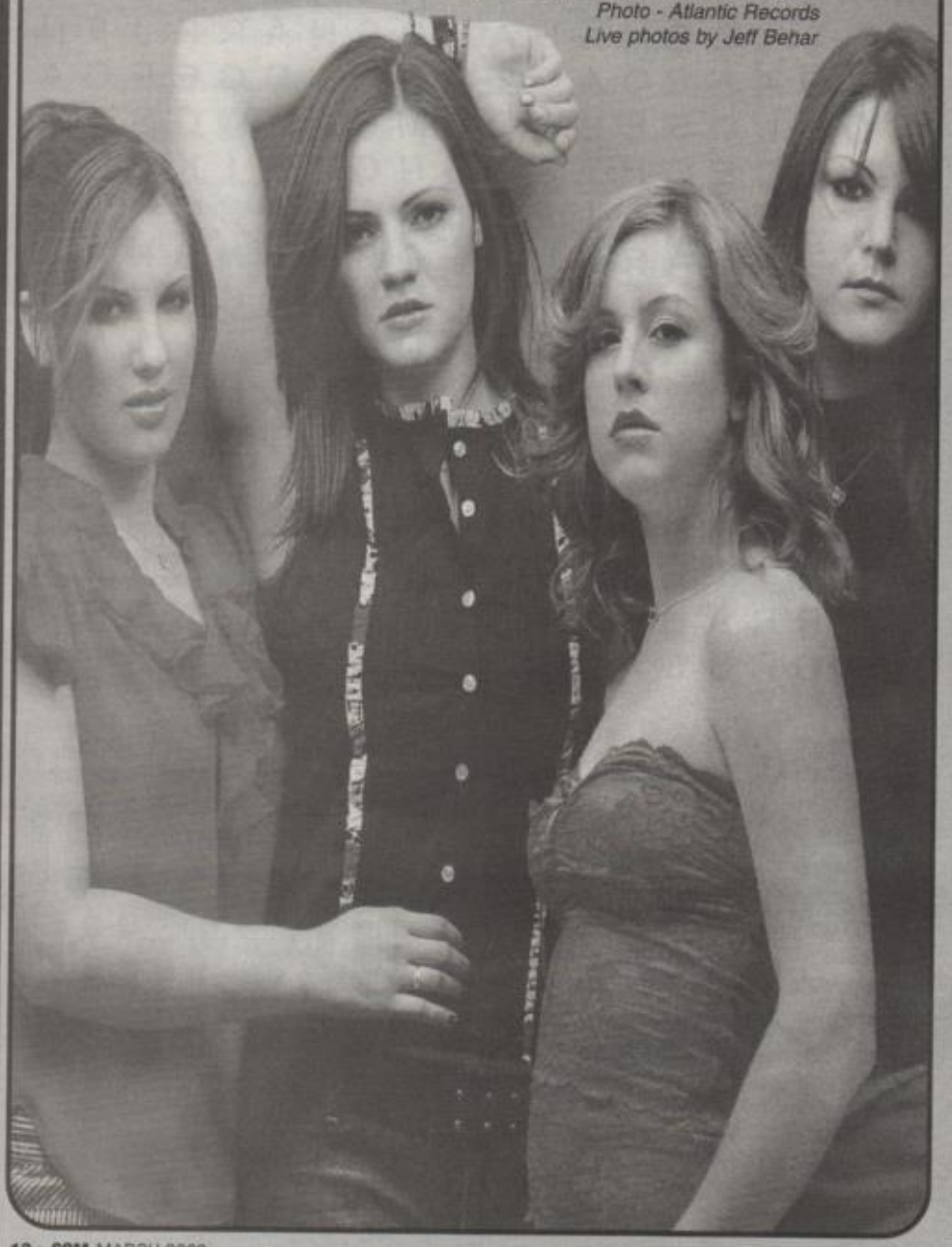
Photos by Jeff Behar

www.soundcheckmag.net
SCM ISSUE 72

THE DONNAS

One Part Eyeshadow and Two Parts Gunpowder: The Donnas Blow Up

By Jesse (Donna Kenmore) Mayer
Photo - Atlantic Records
Live photos by Jeff Behar



The first thing I asked 24-year-old Donnas' drummer Torry Castellano (aka Donna C) once we finally got settled on the tour bus was if she chose to play a pink drum kit because of The New York Dolls....Torry's eyes lit up, "Hell yes, exactly. Finally someone who gets it. It's all about the Dolls, not 'cause we're girls." It had been a long afternoon filled with all the chaos usually reserved for seven- figure rock tours. Plus, the previous night The Donnas had held court at that too cool for school orgy known as a Friday night headliner in NYC at Irving Plaza.Trust me, this is not the optimum situation for a real comfy interview. But,Torry is a drummer's drummer. She plays with the kind of recklessness, soul, and abandon that is spawned in a garage and nurtured on stage that you have to be born with. It can never be taught.This piledriving donnybrook of flying hair, sticks in the sky sweaty rock fury is the straw that stirs the Donnas' drink. Onstage it defines them. Drummers like this always elevate their bands by not only keeping time, but knowing exactly what time it is.Torry knows the crucial truths of the rock: 1) That the 1/4 note cowbell ride contains unstoppable evil rock powers; 2) Firing Steven Adler was the end of Guns N Roses 3) Dave Grohl is way more fun behind the drums that in front of them; and 4) AC/DC's Phil Rudd may well be the greatest rock drummer of all time. Torry and I are in complete agreement, which is always a lovefest for drummers and really annoying for everyone else. If you don't believe me, come hang out with Jimmy (from The Real Kids) and me before a show sometime. We'll make you want to gouge your own eyes out. I guarantee it. But...I digress...

After five records, countless shows, miles, and tours,The Donnas are a band on the brink of the super big time.Their first major label release *Spend The Night* (Atlantic) is out. They are on commercial radio and MTV and have deals with Budweiser, Urban Outfitters, and Target. Do you hear sirens? Me too! Run for cover, here come the Punk Police tryin' to pull over The Donnas' bus and execute 'em for high crimes against the State Of Punk. I say "fuck 'em" because this band started out as 13- and 14-year- old girls in a Palo Alto, California garage that everyone in school ridiculed.They were raised on a steady diet of AC/DC, early Aerosmith and KISS' *Destroyer* only to wind up signed to Lookout. The Donnas fucking inspired Bratmobile to reform by simply being themselves and rocking. But..THEY NEVER CLAIMED TO BE PUNKS in the first place! They only wanted to be a good band.

Right now The Donnas are four 23- and 24-year-old women faced with the two most daunting and necessary tasks in rock: those are getting real rock and real rock women played on the radio simultaneously. As it stands in March of 2003 the only realistic hope there is in the face of the Avril's and Kellys and Christinas are the Donnas (and soon The Distillers). Christalamighty! Someone has to make Joan Jett, Chrissy Hynde, and the rest of us proud. The Donnas are prepared to do just that....By any means necessary.

SoundCheck Magazine: *I'm glad I'm getting to interview you. You play drums just like I do - all forearm, no wrist.*

Torry Castellano: Yes, no wrist. I've been trying to work on the wrist thing; it's hard to get out of the habit. I do warm-ups with my wrist and then when I actually end up playing live, it's like....aarrugh!

SCM: *Can you tell what kind of show you're going to have by the way you sweat in the first song?*

TC: Yeah, I think so. There have been really just a few shows when I thought the show was going to go one way by the first song and then it went another way. I think you can tell maybe in the first two.

SCM: *You were in New York City last night in Irving Plaza? How was that show?*

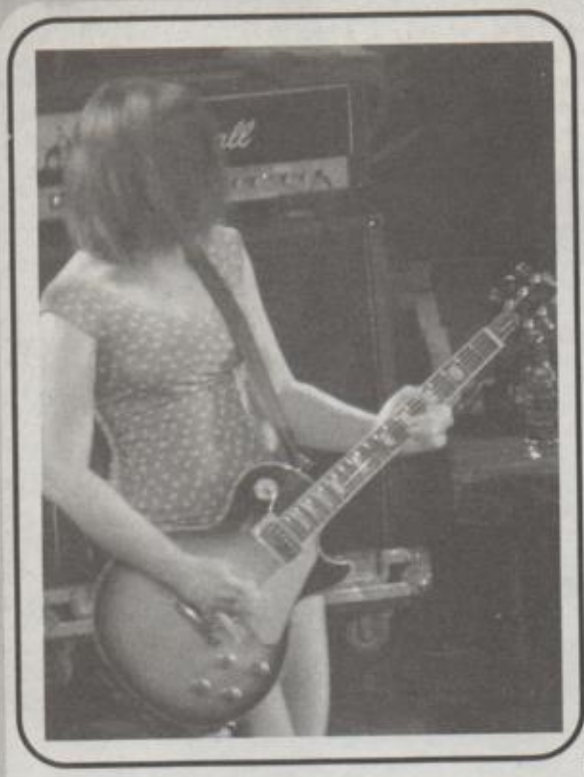
TC: It was pretty crazy. New York is always really bizarre because there are a million, trillion people backstage, people we have to talk to and stuff, and we did a lot of press, which is cool and stuff but – I know it was really hot, talk about sweating, and I just felt like – I didn't feel like I played the best and I was kind of a little disappointed. But we're all really hard on ourselves, so who can know. The crowd was pretty good but sometimes in New York and L.A. the crowd is kind of industry and then they're not as, like, just young kids going crazy. I thought it was O.K.

SCM: *I've read some negative press on you guys of because you've been pretty willing to do whatever it takes to make this band as big as possible and be absolutely shameless about it and I think that's cool. I think rock stars should be rock stars.*

TC: I mean that's the thing is when people say, Oh I can't believe you went to a major label or whatever, you know we were never one of those bands that said, we will never go to a major label and then went to one. We always said we like big shows, we like it when people are really excited to see us live; playing live is the funnest thing that we do in this band and we want to play good live shows, so we want more and more and people and stuff, so yeah we definitely want it to be as big as possible.

SCM: *Rock women are not being played on the radio right now.*

TC: Right and that's another thing about being as big as possible, I'll say that. When we signed with Atlantic we had a meeting with them before our record even came out and they were like, You know, they don't play girls on rock radio. We're going to do our best to try to get you played but it's going



to be an uphill battle. We talked about it all the time and had meetings about it. I think we've had some pretty good success and stuff and I feel really proud about that because it definitely needs to change, it's insane.

SCM: *It's not even rock women – rock doesn't get played on the radio. Nashville Pussy can't get played on the radio. Buckcherry's second disc couldn't really get played on the radio – and that was an awesome record.*

TC: It's depressing.

SCM: *I saw them open for AC/DC and there were maybe 5,000 kids in the Fleet Center and four of us knew the record. Do you know who The Hangmen are?*

TC: I've heard of them.

SCM: *They have a live record on Acitate. They're a little like the Supersuckers, like all the Swedish motorpunk bands are trying to be. You need The Hangmen record, they're the real shit.*

TC: I will check that out.

SCM: *Why do you suppose kids don't connect with rock that's rooted in KISS, AC/DC, Motorhead, and Aerosmith.*

TC: I think it's because they're just bombarded with other bands – that whole nu metal rap rock stuff. I mean it was everywhere and you couldn't escape it. Young kids are going to take what they can get. It's all over MTV, it's all over the radio. I feel like it's better now than it has been in the last few years, definitely. Like even with bands like The White Stripes being able to be played on radio.

SCM: *How did you all wind up - you're obviously steeped in AC/DC and KISS and really good '70s cockrock - you guys were 14, 15 when you started this thing?*

TC: 13 and 14.

SCM: *How did THAT happen?*

TC: Well, Aerosmith and AC/DC and even KISS were totally around when we were younger and first learning - even before we first started our band. I think I got my first AC/DC record when I was in sixth grade or something and so it's just always been around and we've always loved it and I think you feel kind of a fondness for things that you grew up with. I definitely think those bands made music that – it's just really fun and exciting and you could always put on the record and…

SCM: *What's your favorite AC/DC song?*

TC: Probably "Rock and Roll Damnation."

SCM: *"Shot Down In Flames."*

TC: We covered that song.

SCM: *What was your greatest hope for this band when you started it?*

TC: I wanted us to open for the Bikini Kill at Gillman St. That's what I wanted for us. I didn't even want to headline. I just wanted us to open there with them. We never played with the Bikini Kill but we ended up playing at Gillman - actually we kind of sucked.

SCM: *There's a story that the Bikini Kill reformed after seeing The Donnas.*

TC: Bratmobile, that was it.

SCM: *Them and Tribe 8 I always kind of put all on the same plain.*

TC: True and actually we just got to play with Tribe 8. Those are the bands we used to go and see when we were first starting our band. It's really cool to go and see them and stuff and see what girls could do because people kept telling us at our high school that girls couldn't and it was kind of like, well they're doing it.

SCM: *Did the kids in your high school really hate you?*

TC: Yeah. It was just like this alien concept to them that girls would actually ever even want to

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be in a band so I think that they had no idea what to do with it. They would make up all these rumors, once we started our band, literally overnight we were lesbians, drug addicts, satan worshippers.

SCM: *What's wrong with any of that?*

TC: Nothing - but to them that was like a big, huge insult. Another big huge rumor that they put out there that was supposed to be a big insult was that I kicked my bass drum instead of having a bass drum pedal. I don't know where that came from, I don't know why that was a huge insult, but it was like, Whoa, she's crazy or something.

SCM: *What's your greatest hope now for The Donnas?*

TC: I have goals like I want our tour to go well, I want tonight's show to go well; I have some goals like things that are just right now.....I want to get played on the radio more and I want to get played on MTV, too - a lot, even more than we have. I'm really excited about everything that's happened but I really think there has to be rock out there and girls playing rock out there.

SCM: *You guys have been pretty willing to do some corporate tie-in stuff to make that happen, some stuff with Target - is there anything you wouldn't do?*

TC: Definitely we've been offered things that we didn't.

SCM: *For instance what?*

TC: I don't know if I really want to say that - I feel like a lot of people are like, Oh how could you do that? Stuff with Target and Budweiser or whatever and I'll say this: Number one, we like those things; we go to Target all the time; we drink Budweiser, it's our favorite beer. We're not going to do something with some company just because they're asking us to and I feel like that - if you like the product, that's something. And also that Budweiser was going to be on rock radio and that was before we even got played on rock radio and we were like, well maybe at least our song will be playing even in a commercial on rock radio. I think that's really important.

SCM: *What's your greatest fear in The Donnas?*

TC: I don't know...I think whenever we put out a new record, I have worries, like will people like it. I fear every night that I'm going to play badly. [Laughs] I feel like there are a lot fears but you just got to stay focused. I fear that we are never get any sleep or ever going to eat a meal in a day.

SCM: *You guys have completely grown up together. Do you still all love each other.*

TC: Yes.

SCM: *How does that remain intact? You toured for years. You guys have been through a lot.*

TC: I think it's 'cause we were friends before the band even started and I think we had that foundation.

SCM: *Most people who are friends when they're 13 or 14 aren't still friends at 22 or 23.*

TC: Well that is true. But I mean like, three of us went to elementary together, so we were friends for a really long time and it's kind of like a home. We know them so well and they know you so well and I also think that we are doing so much, like you're saying, the other three girls know my experience – they're the only other people really that could really understand what I'm going through and I understand what they're going through. I also think we have really similar senses of humor. We can make each other laugh.

SCM: *I think that's one of the best things about being in a band is that you get to be in a gang.*

TC: Yeah, we definitely feel that way.

SCM: *If Joan Jett got in a fight with Lita Ford, who would win?*

TC: Oh man! I don't want them to even get in a fight! They probably have already...Well, I love

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Lita…I don't even know if I want to answer that question. That's really hard. We've played with Joan and she's just so nice and so cool. I love her.

SCM: *Who are your favorite bands to play with?*

TC: The Strokes were really fun actually. It was kind of crazy, we were like a little nervous about is the audience going to like us. I think it's kind of hard to find bands that we work with musically. They were really cool and they were really nice. I mean I think that's the other thing is that you have to find people that you know you spend so much time, like soundcheck or whatever, like OK Go – they are really nice guys and it's cool just to hang out with them and everything. We've done a couple of shows with Batmobile and they were fun, we're friends with them and stuff. There's this Canadian band, The Smugglers, and we did a couple of tours with them and they're really funny and so that was kind of cool.

SCM: *Who are your favorite three drummers?*

TC: Tommy Lee, definitely. I like Phil Rudd from AC/DC, definitely one of my favorites. A lot of people when I say that, they're like, But he's so simple… He puts the song first and I think he does do some really cool little things that add to that song without taking over. I think that's really important.

SCM: *You're the only other drummer other me that ever says Phil Rudd.*

TC: That's so cool!

SCM: *I would probably say Paul Cook from The Sex Pistols.*

TC: Oh yeah, he's great.

SCM: *Give me a third.*

TC: I like Charlie Watts a lot.

SCM: *If you could open for any band out of the history of rock and roll, who would it be?*

TC: I guess I'd have to say either Guns 'N' Roses with the original lineup or AC/DC.

SCM: *If every baby girl was given an electric guitar, a copy of KISS "Alive," and a pair of engineer boots as a birthright, would the world be a better place?*

TC: Yes.

SCM: *I agree; and in order to make the same kind of improvement, what should every baby boy be given?*

TC: Maybe some soap – because I think after a while some guys – not all guys – don't really feel like they have to shower anymore. I think it might be kind of cool if they got the soap when they were young and then maybe when they were around like 22 or something, using it would be a habit. ◂